

What are my options when finding a new companion animal?

1. Visit your local BC SPCA community animal centre. Every cat, dog and rabbit available for adoption at the BC SPCA is spayed or neutered and comes with a free health check from a local veterinary clinic (where applicable). Cats and dogs are vaccinated, dewormed, microchipped, receive flea/tick protection and come with six weeks of free pet health insurance and a bag of food. Adopters of small animals receive handouts for general care and feeding/housing requirements.
2. Reach out to other local animal shelters and rescue groups. To find rescue groups for specific species, try Petfinder.com or search online: try typing in your city or province name, the breed or species you want and the word "adopt".
3. Help rehome an animal. You can use classified websites like *BuySellTrade*, *Craigslist*, and *UsedEverywhere*, to search for animals that need a new home because their current one isn't the right fit. If the animal still appears to be an infant or the price advertised is high, treat the situation the same as if buying from a breeder.
4. Find a reputable breeder. Follow the steps inside this guide to find an animal that is a good match and will live a long, healthy, happy life.

Why is it important to find a reputable breeder?

Would you buy a car from someone who changed the odometer to read 100,000 less kilometers? Sometimes, people are motivated by profit rather than "customer satisfaction."

Animal breeders are people who come from all walks of life. Some breed because they believe in the human-animal bond. Others breed because they are looking to make money. When profit serves as a motive, animal welfare suffers. Time and time again, the BC SPCA Cruelty Investigations Department discovers breeders who:

- Force the animals to live in barren, crowded and/or filthy conditions
- Deprive the animals of time spent playing with each other or humans
- Neglect veterinary care, leading to fleas, mites, worms and open wounds
- Breed animals indiscriminately, including inbreeding and genetic abnormalities

Animals raised in these conditions are riddled with costly health and behaviour problems and have difficulty adjusting to life with humans and other animals.

Avoid purchasing from a pet store that claims they've investigated the breeder: only you can provide assurance that an animal came from a reputable breeder.

VISIT THE PLACE YOUR NEW COMPANION WAS RAISED!

Before heading to the breeder, do your research to know what answers you should expect to the questions below. Look for a calm, professional and friendly breeder – someone who is at ease and happy when they are with their animals. Breeders who care about the human-animal bond will ask you questions to make sure that you are the best home for the animal. They will also be open to your respectful questions.

If they cannot answer the following questions or stumble to come up with an answer, it is a red flag!

LONG-TERM HEALTH AND GENETICS

If you have any concerns about the animal's parent's veterinary history, contact a veterinarian to get a second opinion before making your purchase decision.

- May I look through the veterinary records of the mother?
- What do you know about the father's medical history?
- What are frequent genetic problems associated with this breed/species?
At what age do the problems usually show up?
- What do you do to avoid genetic abnormalities?

LIVING CONDITIONS

- May I see where the mom spends her time when she doesn't have offspring?
Can we take her to where she likes to play?
- Where were the little ones when they were first born? Where do they spend their time now?

SOCIALIZATION

You want a mom for your companion animal who is comfortable around humans! Look for her to have a social, relaxed posture. As offspring get older, they need to encounter everything they would experience in their adult life before they are grown. The more handling and exposure to noise and different environments, the better! For puppies, this is called the "sensitive period" and runs from approximately 7-12 weeks.

- May I spend some time with the mom?
- Where have you taken the little ones? What noises and circumstances have they been exposed to?
Who has handled them and how often?

Report your findings!

Signs of a breeder that is driven by profit: will not let you meet the mother, see where the animals have been raised, will not share veterinary records and/or meets at an offsite location (e.g., coffee shop or ferry terminal). Some unscrupulous breeders will keep most of their animals' offsite and then sell from a nice home. Be wary of suspicious behaviour.

Are you concerned about a phone call, an offsite meeting, or something on the property? Gather as much information as possible and contact our toll-free Animal Cruelty Reporting Hotline at **1-855-622-7722**. Remember: if anything feels off, it is worth calling it in.